



Kelsey D.

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DEFINING THE 'SICK SOCIETY': DISCOURSES OF CLASS AND MORALITY IN BRITISH, RIGHT WING NEWSPAPERS DURING THE 2011 ENGLAND RIOTS

ABSTRACT

Between 6th and 10th August 2011, acts of violence and civil disobedience occurred in sixty-six locations across London and other cities in England. Initial responses from politicians and the press sought to explain why the riots were happening and what responses were necessary. This paper shows how the initial *depoliticised actions* of rioters were redefined as a *politicised problem*, symbolic of a sick society that could be cured by Conservative social policy. I provide a Critical Discourse Analysis of 30 articles (between 9th and 12th August) from British, right wing newspapers (*Daily Mail*; *Sun*; *Daily Telegraph*); exploring discursive constructions of social class, morality, the 'mob', and perceptions of a 'sick society' that mobilised a battlefield of political arguments during and after the riots.

As previous work has demonstrated, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can explore political complexities, paradoxical persuasions and discursive complications whilst remaining critical in its approach (Kelsey, 2012, 2013). I argue that the right wing press featured nuanced discursive and paradoxical mechanisms, whilst maintaining a broader, consistent, ideological position. This paper shows how ideological consistencies that operate beyond the foreground and immediacy of individual texts can override the appearance of discursive contradiction across longitudinal contexts. Hence, the discursive landscape that I cover in this article can be interpreted through an understanding of *paradoxical persuasion* amongst other discursive and political contexts.

INTRODUCTION

On 4th August 2011 a 29 year old black male was shot dead by police in Tottenham. On 6th August a peaceful protest took place in Tottenham against the shooting. When police in Tottenham attempted to disperse the protest violent clashes occurred as large groups also responded by setting fire to police and public properties. From 7th August onwards, these acts of violence and civil disobedience spread across London and other cities in England with riots and looting taking place in sixty-six locations. Whilst these were not necessarily instances of protest violence following the events in Tottenham, they were clearly reactions mobilised by the riots that started a day earlier. Lasting until 10th August, 5 people died in the riots, which are estimated to have involved up to 15,000 people and cost the country up to half a billion pounds (Bridges, 2012:2).

This article explores press responses during the riots followed by coverage of those arrested when the accused appeared in court. The latter then leads to coverage of proposed, legislative measures for punishing perpetrators. As I show, contentions between constructions of social class, morality, who the ‘mob’ consisted of (demographically), and what politicians mean when they refer to a ‘sick society’ mobilised a battlefield of ideological constructions. As previous work has demonstrated Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can explore ideological complexities, paradoxical persuasions and discursive complications whilst remaining critical of its approach (Kelsey, 2012, 2013). By considering such discursive nuances I address the following questions: How did right wing newspapers suppress critical discourses of deprivation and austerity during the riots? How were the depoliticised actions of rioters

redefined as a political problem (a sick society) to justify legislative responses from the government?

This article does not attempt to propose one, fixed answer to explain why the riots happened or who was to blame. Actually, as Cavalcanti et al. (2012: 35) argue, fundamental problems faced in attempts to understand why these riots happened lie in reductionist discourses that constructed them as a product of one particular social, economic or political issue from either end of the political spectrum. So this paper recognises that whilst there was not one fixed explanation for the riots, these different responses discursively constructed the riots in political contexts. Even in instances when rioters supposedly lacked a political message or motivation, these events were still understood through mediatized and political contexts by journalists, politicians and the public. By addressing the research questions I have posed it is possible to assess how various media and political sources constructed social and political actors during the riots and how particular, political messages were both suppressed and mobilised through media discourses. Various authors have commented on responses to the riots, some of which should be considered before my own analysis.

RIOTS UNDER REVIEW

Initial responses to the riots sought to explain why they were happening. Whilst issues of race were represented as partly relevant to begin with, widespread looting and rioting across the country had clearly taken on a less identifiable or common cause for violence than those on the initial evening following the protest against the police. Bridges has examined some of the responses from politicians following the initial unrest in Tottenham:

... [David] Lammy was one of the first politicians, standing before cameras on Tottenham High Road the following day, to describe the rioters as ‘mindless, mindless people’, to which he has subsequently added the epitaphs of nihilistic and hedonistic. In this, Lammy gave the lead to other political leaders in their characterisation of the riots as ‘criminality, pure and simple’ (Prime Minister David Cameron), ‘needless and opportunist theft and violence’ (Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg) and the product of ‘a feral underclass’ (Justice Secretary Kenneth Clark) (Bridges, 2012:3).

These responses demonstrated a tendency among political sources to depoliticise, criminalise and deligitmise voices that sought to provide deeper, sociological and economic analysis of the riots. In response, Younge argues that the context of the riots held a political substance, even if the immediate actions did not appear to be explicitly political:

Insisting on the criminality of those involved, as though that alone explains their motivation and the context is irrelevant, is fatuous. To stress criminality does not deny the political nature of what took place, it simply chooses to only partially describe it. They were looting, not shop-lifting, and challenging the police for control of the streets, not stealing coppers’ hubcaps. When a group of people join forces to flout both law and social convention, they are acting politically. (The question, as yet unanswered, is to what purpose.) (Younge, *Guardian*, 2011)

As psychologists Steve Reicher and Cliff Stott – who I return to in my analysis – have commented, the language of ‘mindlessness’ and simplistic descriptions of the ‘mob’ are dangerous, misleading and unhelpful since they detract from the deeper understandings that are needed in explaining why these events occur (2011). It is also worth noting that the *Riots Communities and Victims Panel*, set up by the coalition government with a cross-party make-

up, was reluctant to acknowledge structural factors in society or courses of poverty, deprivation and family issues that it implied were contributing factors in a 'culture of poverty' (Bridges, 2012:8).¹ As Bridges also observed, 'Even when the Panel touches on more structural issues, it does so in ways that seem oblivious to the depth of the economic crisis and government austerity cuts, especially as they impact on the inner cities' (ibid:9).

It is the tension between condemnatory and observational or empathetic analyses of the riots that contextualise the focus of this paper. Whilst the former were concerned with inexcusable criminality that left little space for alternative analysis, the latter sought to provide further attention to detail regarding political and socio-economic causes or contexts for understanding the riots. Of course, various literature since August 2011 has commented, often critically, on the initial understandings evoked through political and media sources during and following the riots, whilst often trying to gain a more informed and complex understanding of why they happened (Dennis and Cavanagh, 2012; Fuchs, 2012; Taylor, 2012; Milburn, 2012; Benyon, 2011; Younge, 2011; Reicher and Stott, 2011; Cavalcanti et al., 2012; Angel, 2012; Bridges, 2012; Ball and Drury, 2012; Dean, 2012; Jefferson, 2012; Lagrange, 2012; Lea and Hallsworth, 2012; Palmer, 2012; Waddington, 2012a; Waddington 2012b). It is also true that other media sources at the time projected critical voices that sought to understand, more constructively (without excusing), why the riots happened (Carragher, 2011:6; Batmanghelidjh, 2011). So it is important to recognise that media coverage and political responses to the riots were incredibly complex, especially in the right wing press that I consider in this article. Therefore, my awareness of such discursive complexity informs my approach to CDA, which is outlined below.

METHODOLOGY

My approach to this analysis shares common ground with the analytical frameworks that consider language from a functionalist perspective (Fowler, 1991; Simpson, 1993; Fairclough, 1995; Mayr, 2008; Richardson, 2007). As Fowler argues: ‘Anything that is said or written about the world is articulated from a particular ideological position: language is not a clear window but a refracting, structuring medium’ (Fowler, 1991:10). Similar to the concerns expressed and agenda that is set through a moral panic, it is argued in CDA that discourse can restrict and allow certain discussions of a topic. Discourse is therefore seen as ‘a culturally and socially organized way of speaking’ (Mayr, 2008:7). Analysing discourse in this context follows a traditional purpose to scholars of CDA: it challenges dominant power relations and attempt to tackle social inequality or misrepresentation (Van Dijk, 1998; Fairclough, 2005; Richardson, 2007; Wodak et al, 1999). Wodak also considers discourse-historical traits by ‘tracing the historical (intertextual) history of phrases and arguments ... and centres on political issues such as racism, integrating all available background information in the analysis and interpretation of the different layers of a text’ (2008:9). Similarly, the context of certain social identities being recognised as a threat relies on the discursive and historical knowledge gained previously before the immediate event concerned (van Dijk, 2001). Although I do not attempt to provide a discourse-*historical* analysis in this paper it is important to consider the context and knowledge that readers bring to a text, especially in their choice of newspaper (its political position in mind) and perspective on certain social identities. It is also the broader socio-political approach of CDA that provides me with a coherent framework and set of analytical tools for examining contemporary media texts.

Norman Fairclough’s approach to CDA attempted to ‘transcend the division between work inspired by social theory which tends not to analyse texts, and work which focuses upon the language of texts but tends not to engage with social theoretical issues’ (2003:2-3). As he

puts it ‘discourse analysis is not merely the linguistic analysis of texts. I see discourse analysis as ‘oscillating‘ between a focus on specific texts and a focus on what I call the ‘order of discourse‘‘ (ibid:3). Fairclough’s approach includes ‘interdiscursive analysis, that is, seeing texts in terms of the different discourses, genres and styles they draw upon and articulate together’ (Fairclough, 2003:3). This enables a critical outlook on ‘the relatively durable structuring of language which is itself one element of the relatively durable structuring and networking of social practices’ (ibid:3). CDA focuses ‘on the ways discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of power and dominance in society’ (van Dijk, 1998:353) and, subsequently, takes an explicit socio-political position in its attempt to directly challenge problems in social relations. When there is a particular problem concerned, CDA is explicitly political in its approach regarding the social issue(s) being addressed. It is this socio-political position and discursive framework that I adopt below. Although, rather than close linguistic analysis of semantic structures and lexical detail (an approach often adopted by those CDA scholars above), my analysis draws on particular discourses through textual extracts as examples of common themes (or ‘news hooks’) and discussions that recurred in my sample.

Whilst I examined every national, daily newspaper from 9th-12th August, this analysis is based on 30 articles from three, right wing newspapers – *Daily Mail*, *Sun*, and *Daily Telegraph* – across the same time period. After summarising the front pages of daily, national papers on August 9th (in order to provide a broad overview of responses to the riots after the initial days of violence) I then divide this analysis into three sections that explore the discursive complexities that I am concerned with across the right wing publications above. Whilst I examine all genres – news stories, columns, editorials – I acknowledge instances when columns and editorials are clearly providing opinion and often contributing to the discursive complexities of news across these publications. My focus begins by exploring

examples from texts that directly opposed and suppressed discourses of social deprivation. I then consider the discursive mechanisms used to support the latter through the demographic profiles of an ‘unlikely mob’. But it is then the final section of analysis that shows how right wing discourses functioned paradoxically; complicating their own discursive position by supporting Conservative (or coalition) social policies aimed at the poorest sections of society (the sick society) that they had initially sought to exempt from sole responsibility for the riots.

It is this approach to CDA that enables me to explore instances of *paradoxical persuasion* (Kelsey, 2012), which I return to in my analysis. As my previous work has shown, discursive complexities, contradictions and complications can be understood through analysis that addresses the broader ideological contexts, connections and influences, which are relevant to the production and consumption of texts. These elements can be highlighted through Fairclough’s three layered approach that considers: the *text* in terms of its language and representation; the *discursive practice* operating in the production and consumption of a text; the *social practice* concerned in how a discourse impacts upon society and how broader social practices have impacted upon the text. By going beyond the language of a text itself, we can explore these broader discursive and social practices that carry and reflect significant ideological constructs. It is within this framework that I use a number of analytical tools. I do not always explicitly refer back to these terms throughout my analysis. Rather, I define them here before I consider the following discursive traits:

Hyperbole involves the excessive exaggeration of aspects within texts. Van Dijk describes hyperbole as the “description of an event or action in strongly exaggerated terms” in order to enhance its severity or justify particular actions in response (1995:154).

Intertextuality refers to the interlinking of one text to other texts in both past and present

contexts (Wodak, 2008:3). This might involve repeated references to the same events, or the transferring of ‘main arguments from one text into the next’ (ibid:3). This also applies for the recurrence and continued reference to main actors or topics within stories across texts’ (ibid:3).

Interdiscursivity differs to intertextuality in the sense that it accounts for the fact that certain discourses are linked to each other in different ways across and within texts. As Wodak explains, ‘a discourse on un/employment often refers for example to topics of other discourses, such as gender or racism: arguments on systematically lower salaries for women or migrants might be included in discourses on employment’ (ibid:3). Topics of discourse tend to spread and overlap with other fields and discourses that are sometimes ‘socio-functionally linked with each other’ (ibid:17). As we see discourses of unemployment, social class, welfare, and criminality, amongst other discourses become interlinked in responses to the riots.

Modality accounts for the ‘different ways in which people can temper or qualify their messages and express attitudes and judgements of various kinds’ (Mayr, 2008:19). Modality often adopts an array of grammatical terms in order to express an attitude or judgement. These range from modal verbs (‘can’ ‘must’ ‘should’) to modal adverbs (‘obviously’, ‘clearly’, ‘probably’, ‘perhaps’, ‘definitely’), copular verbs (‘is’, ‘seems’, ‘appears’) and cognition verbs (‘think’, ‘believe’, ‘feel’) (ibid:20). The person speaking or writing – politician or journalist – uses this vocabulary to deliver their judgment or attitude on the topic concerned. As I demonstrate below, modal language often sought to define one fixed reason for the riots or insist on necessary responses from the government and courts.

Presupposition accounts for the ‘taken-for-granted, implicit claim embedded within the explicit meaning of a text or utterance’ (Richardson, 2007:242). Presuppositions were both expressed or challenged through in responses to the riots in discussions about the social

backgrounds and demographics of rioters.

Predication considers the ‘words used to represent more directly the values and characteristics of social actors’ (Richardson, 2007:52). As Reisigl and Wodak point out, predication strategies provide ‘the very basic process and result of linguistically assigning qualities to persons, animals, objects, events, actions and social phenomena’ (2001:52).

Symptoms over causes concern the attention that is given to the outcome of events, like the devastation and suffering caused, but with little effort made to explain why it has happened. Interestingly, in this analysis there are simultaneous efforts to suppress and discuss symptoms, according to the source and ideological interests concerned.

With the tools and approaches covered in this section in mind, through the contextual depth and complexity that this framework of CDA enables us to explore, we can address the ideological operations concerned. We can explain how discourses that appear contradictory on one level still maintain a consistent political position and ideological influence on another. This analysis will now investigate those mechanisms that operate within and beyond the texts in my sample.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Yobs, mobs and morons: Setting the scenes of anarchy

The front page headlines below feature the foreground coverage of harder crimes, dramatic images and focus on the police in order to depict the level of destruction caused by rioters. Unsurprisingly, these featured anarchistic symbols of burning cars, fires, flames from buildings, masked looters and acts of vandalism. This was understandably a discourse of civil disobedience that framed the extent of disorder. The *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *Guardian*, *i-newspaper*, *Daily Star*, and *Sun* all used the image of a man in a hooded tracksuit and masked face in the foreground with a burning car behind him in Hackney. The *Independent* and

Mirror both used another picture taken in Hackney of a man, again with his face covered, holding a can of Special Brew lager in the foreground, walking across a burning car in the background. The *Telegraph* and *Times* showed dramatic images of burning buildings with the former showing a member of the public jumping from a window to escape a fire. As the headlines accompanying these images show, themes of anarchy and mob rule were prominent:

FLAMING MORONS, THUGS AND THIEVES TERRORISE BRITAIN'S STREETS
(*Daily Express*, August 9th, 2011)

THE ANARCHY SPREADS (*Daily Mail*, August 9th, 2011)

YOB RULE (*Daily Mirror*, August 9th, 2011)

ANARCHY IN THE UK (*Daily Star*, August 9th, 2005)

RULE OF THE MOB (*Daily Telegraph*, August 9th, 2011)

MOB RULE (*The Independent*, August 9th, 2011)

ANARCHY (*The Sun*, August 9th, 2011)

MOBS RULE AS POLICE SURRENDER STREETS (*The Times*, August 9th, 2011)

OUT OF CONTROL: RIOTS REACH CRISIS POINT (*i-newspaper*, August 9th, 2011)

THE BATTLE FOR LONDON (*The Guardian*, August 9th, 2011)

It is worth noting that the *Guardian* and *Independent* were more focussed on the police's efforts and position in the conflict than the other newspapers, which – despite the *Independent*'s headline above – featured more prominent references to 'the mob' and discussions about those within it. Nonetheless, the notion that the police had lost control of

the streets still prevailed. The headlines above are not surprising but they do provide the foundations for complex discursive elements that featured thereafter. They also set a context for the resistance that occurred in efforts to suppress certain explanations for the riots. As psychologists Reicher and Stott argue:

So the accusation of mindlessness, the lazy language of the ‘mob’... is not just wrong. It is positively dangerous. It stops us paying attention to what crowd actions tells us about how rioters understand their society. It stops us from addressing how these understandings come about. It dooms us to more disaffection, more division and more violence (2011).

At this stage, the notion of mob rule and anarchy on London’s streets suggested the law and order of a civilised society had been compromised by a *mindless* group who were detached from society – rather than a group who were products of society or held a conscious view on their role (or lack of a role) in society. It is now my sample of the right wing press that I pay closer attention to in this analysis.

Suppressing cynical lefties: The discourse of criminality (pure and simple)

The *Daily Mail* accompanied its August 9th, front page headline, ‘THE ANARCHY SPREADS’, with an extract from its comment page: ‘To blame the cuts is immoral and cynical. This is criminality pure and simple’ (August 9th, 2011). Political Editor, Tim Shipman’s article was also headlined, ‘LEFT WING CYNICS BLAME THE TORY CUTS FOR THE MAYHEM’ (August 9th, 2011:8). He said:

Left-wing politicians have cynically sought to make political capital out of the riots, blaming government cuts for the orgy of violence. Labour MPs and activists lined up

to make excuses for the thugs, spouting claims that disadvantaged youth had no option but to smash up high streets' (ibid:8).

Both Shipman's article and the comment piece in the *Mail* criticised the BBC for the attention they gave to community workers who were blaming cuts and social deprivation for the riots:

Much of the violence and widespread looting which has swept across London can be blamed on government cuts, poverty and homelessness, if you believe the BBC (ibid: 8);

Inevitably, the BBC is determinedly helping to peddle this myth – seeking out community leaders who blame a lack of youth clubs for the looting, and revelling in footage of Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg being harangued by residents blaming 'Coalition cuts' (August 9th, 2011:12).

The *Mail*'s position here was common throughout responses to the riots (including other media, public and political sources beyond the scope of this analysis). In fact, the *Mail* provided their own community source, Lindsay Johns, to counter this view. Under the headline, 'A STINGING REBUKE FROM AN INNER-CITY YOUTH WORKER: APOLOGISTS FOR THESE THUGS SHOULD HANG THEIR HEADS IN SHAME', he argued:

We are told the rioters have been motivated by their rage at inequality, deprivation and unemployment. Some have blamed police brutality; others have wailed about 'Tory cuts' or the closure of youth clubs. But such explanations are as misguided as they're immoral. In reality, there is no justification for the outbreak of carnage that's gripped the capital (Johns, August 9th, 2011:12).

Like the *Mail*'s comment piece, the riots themselves were not just seen as acts of immorality; those seeking to provide political and social explanations were immoral too. In depoliticising the context of the riots it is interesting that Johns blamed 'mindless criminality' and 'opportunistic materialism' as explanations for looting: 'What we witnessed was despicable. Far from representing a political act, it was nothing more than a mixture of mindless criminality and opportunistic materialism' (ibid:12).

On 9th August, the *Sun* featured a two page spread a discourse of mindless violence. Headlined, 'RABBLE WITHOUT A CAUSE' under a title banner saying, 'THUGS' ORGY OF MINDLESS VIOLENCE' (Crick et al., 2011:5), witnesses provided accounts. The following witness statements echo Ken Clarke's description of a 'feral underclass' and Cameron's claims of family breakdown:

There were little kids running around everywhere. They can't have been much older than eight. They were telling their older brothers when police were on the move. ...
An off-duty bus driver said 'They were like animals. It's very frightening'.

The *Sun*'s editorial column the same day commented, 'As The Sun has said, this has nothing to do with protests over the shooting of a Tottenham man by police. This is anarchy, pure and simple' (2011:8) Whilst this is similar to the *Daily Mail*'s response ('criminality', 'pure and simple') it is also concerned with distancing the riots from any association with a protest against the police.

The *Daily Telegraph* on August 9th did feature more articles about general policing issues, calls for more aggressive police strategies, and other concerns about online threats from rioters' organisation via social networks. However, its coverage still reflected a similar, oppositional and critical voice against arguments that connected the riots with the economic crisis, austerity and social deprivation. For example, the *Telegraph*'s editorial comment on 9th

August argued that 'real' communities were being overlooked because of soft excuses for criminality:

The word 'community', heard so often in the past few days, has become a euphemism for an allegedly disfranchised group of young men and women whose alienation from the mainstream of society is used to excuse criminal behaviour. For years, the police have been encouraged to 'engage' with these people. But the real community surely comprises the law-abiding majority (2011:21).

Its other main point supported the response of David Lammy as a voice of opposition against 'bleeding heart liberals' who sought to explain the 'mindlessness' and 'greed' of rioters:

The view of this real community is not to be heard in the sentiments of bleeding heart liberals, who always find an explanation for such behaviour beyond opportunistic greed and mindless vandalism. Rather, it was provided by David Lammy, the local Labour MP. His unequivocal condemnation of the rioters needs to be replicated by others in his party who have, grotesquely, blamed Government spending cuts for the disorder (ibid:21).

Notably, this was an instance when a discourse of materialism and greed appeared without mobilising further socio-economic commentary on a consumer society or wider societal structures. Furthermore, as Bridges argues in his research, the conclusions that Lammy drew from the riots were significantly flawed in the insight they provided:

Many would dispute Lammy's description of current police-black community relations, whether in Tottenham or elsewhere in London and other cities. For example, in the three months to the end of June 2011, there were 6,894 police stop and searches in the local borough of Haringey, with only eighty-seven of these

resulting in an arrest and conviction. London-wide and national statistics consistently show that stop and searches have increased steadily and are directed disproportionately at black and Asian youth in particular (2012:4-5)

But it should be noted that a *Telegraph* column printed next to its own editorial comment provided a similar opinion to that of which it was criticising. Under the headline, 'THE UNDERCLASS IS LASHING OUT AT A BRITAIN THAT HAS TURNED ITS BACK', columnist Mary Riddell blamed the left and right for their neglect of a social underclass and the growing inequalities of society during an economic crisis:

The real causes are more insidious. It is no coincidence that the worst violence London has seen in many decades takes place against the backdrop of a global economy poised for freefall. The causes of recession set out by J K Galbraith in his book, *The Great Crash 1929*, were as follows: bad income distribution, a business sector engaged in 'corporate larceny', a weak banking structure and an import/export imbalance. ... Today, Britain is less equal, in wages, wealth and life chances, than at any time since then. Last year alone, the combined fortunes of the 1,000 richest people in Britain rose by 30 per cent to £333.5 billion (2011:20).

This was an isolated piece in the *Telegraph* but it is still interesting that editorially there was space for this variation and complexity, if only as an exception to the general rule. Although Riddell acknowledged that reductionist arguments blaming just the cuts or race relations are too simplistic she did attempt to provide an economically critical perspective:

This is not a *cri de coeur* for the failed and failing. Nor is it a lament for the impoverished. Mob violence, despicable and inexcusable, must always be condemned. But those terrorising and trashing London are also a symptom of a wider malaise (ibid:20).

It is not entirely surprising that this column appeared; since comment sections do allow space for variation of opinion that might differ to the general editorial values of the paper. However, the thorough and critically engaging account from Riddell was printed next to the *Telegraph's* editorial comment that day, which directly dismissed the type of explanation that she provided.

So it is clear from the discursive elements considered above that these newspapers made explicit attempts to critically oppose voices that sought to provide 'sympathetic' explanations for the riots. It was this discursive mechanism that developed into instances of blame towards political correctness hindering police efforts to control the violence. For example, amongst various articles supporting aggressive police tactics to control the riots, James Slack's analysis article in the *Daily Mail* featured the headline: 'Rudderless Met Crippled by liberalism'. Slack argued that political correctness – mainly due to the Stephen Lawrence case – hindered police efforts to control the riots:

The appalling handling of the heinous murder of Stephen was born out of incompetence, yet the Macpherson inquiry branded the police 'institutionally racist' – and they have been doing their hands tied behind their backs ever since, especially considering large numbers of the protagonists are black teenagers (12th August, 2011: 11)

The *Sun's* associate editor, Trevor Kavanagh evoked similar accusations of blame whilst also referring to issues of benefits and social welfare:

So, who is responsible and what can we do about it? Well, don't blame the police on the streets of Hackney, Croydon or Brixton for letting Britain down. Blame their politically-correct commanders and the handwringing politicians who adopt the cringe position when the 'underprivileged' resort to violence. Blame the Macpherson Report

which emasculated our police by branding the entire force ‘institutionally racist’. Blame lawmakers like Justice Secretary Ken Clarke or Labour’s ‘equalities’ crusader Harriet Harman who believe a slap on the wrist is the answer. And blame hypocrites like Ken Livingstone and the race relations industry who have made a good living out of grievance politics and the victimhood of workshy whingers (2011:12-13).

These instances demonstrate how various interdiscursive mechanisms were cutting into the construction of blame and calls for harder policing and judicial responses – an issue that I return to below.² What is also interesting about Kavanagh’s piece is that he resorted to a criticism of the welfare state; contradicting other discourses, which argued that immorality *transcended* social class. It is those instances where class complexity complicated discourses of blame, class and morality that I address below.

An unlikely mob and the case of Laura Johnson: A discourse of confusion (and paradoxical persuasion) in representations of the accused

In this section I consider some of the discursive dynamics that functioned as ‘paradoxically persuasive’ (Kelsey, 2012) mechanisms of discourse; serving an immediate (albeit contradictory) purpose that still maintained a broader, social and political agenda. In previous work I have considered how certain stories or discursive features might appear to contradict the ideological interests or political position of a particular source or newspaper (which we understand through the contextual and historical knowledge that we bring to our readings of texts). Despite the apparent contradictions that occur, a more nuanced contextual reading considers how different discursive mechanisms serve particular purposes in immediate and temporary environments. This reading can actually help to make sense of the ideological positions that are *maintained* through such ‘contradictions’ rather than compromising the broader interests that they serve. Particularly in the case of Laura Johnson, we see a

temporary purpose served: Johnson was used as a discursive device to oppose suggestions that the riots were a product of social deprivation. But these stories actually complicate and contradict later developments in other stories when the government targeted housing benefits (which I address below) in order to punish some rioters in addition to their legal convictions. Despite the contradictions across these stories and events, the ideological consistency that these discourses serve, operates beyond the contradictory foreground in a longitudinal context that functions beyond their immediate production and purpose. Hence the stories covered below, within the broader discursive landscape that I cover in this article, can be interpreted through this understanding of paradoxical persuasion.

Before considering the discourse of confusion that occurred when rioters appeared in court it is important to recognise the context of a moral public versus the immoral ('scum') rioters that had been established beforehand. Discourses of community defiance against the riots were often mobilised through two stories: large voluntary groups turning out for street clean ups; and members of the public physically defending their streets against rioters. The clean ups featured images of the public with brooms often held in the air to imply defiance and victory. A girl with a message written across her top saying 'LOOTERS ARE SCUM' also featured as a large image in the *Sun* and *Mail*. Whilst these discourses juxtaposed the moral consensus of law abiding citizens with the faceless identity of the 'mob' (or 'scum') this binary construction was interrupted by the profiles of the accused appearing in court: 'POSTMAN, SCHOOL MENTOR, CHARITY WORKER, LIFEGUARD, BOY OF 11. THE UNLIKELY RIOTERS HAULED TO COURT' (Greenwood, August 11th, 2011:6-7).

Acknowledging the 'unlikely' profiles here this article recognised an element of unexpected complexity in the demographic profile of rioters: 'But while the trouble has been largely blamed on feral teenagers, many of those paraded before the courts yesterday led apparently respectful lives'. The *Daily Telegraph's* front page that day invoked Cameron's phrase in

response to the riots, with the headline, 'Our sick society', which was accompanied by the following: 'As Cameron condemns riots, suspected looters in court include a boy of 11, a grammar school girl, and a teaching assistant' (Gilligan, 2011:1).

Another *Telegraph* headline on the same day, said: 'GIRL WHO HAS IT ALL IS ACCUSED OF THEFT', and provided a detailed account of Laura Johnson: 'Laura Johnson appears as far removed as possible from the lawless 'underclass' said to have been blighting Britain's streets' (Whitehead and Watt, 2011:3). In Gilligan's article he also wrote, 'They were, some told us, the alienated poor, those without hope, lashing out in rage and despair. But as the accused London rioters started appearing in court they included university students, a rich businessman's daughter and a boy of 11' (2011:1-2). Even within Gilligan's article there is another implicit understanding of a 'type' of person who fits the profile of Cameron's 'sick society':

Most defendants conformed more closely to Mr Cameron's 'sick society' template. There was Richard Myles-Palmer, with a foot-long list of convictions, found wheeling a shopping trolley full of stolen power tools through south London. He and his co-defendant, Jason Gary White, pleaded guilty. Humble in the dock in their white issue T-shirts, they were transformed men when they emerged from court, masked up and making hand signals of defiance (Gilligan, 2011:2).

Gilligan's reference to 'most defendants' holding previous convictions is also problematic. Ball and Drury have explained in their research that statistics were used inaccurately – and ideologically – in response to the riots, arguing that 'it is very likely that those who were arrested and/or charged, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the August riots, were primarily those with (extensive) criminal records whose faces were uncovered and secondly those who had no previous record but were unmasked' (2012:12). As they point out, due to

the use of CCTV the former group were far more likely to be arrested than any other due the police records that were used to identify unmasked individuals (ibid:12). It was also the case that police authorities recognised this bias in statistics, as demonstrated by an exchange between Acting Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Tim Godwin, and the Home Affairs Committee during the weeks following the riots.³ In response to Gilligan's report at the time, this is important since its pre-supposition partly informs support for harder judicial responses.

The *Sun*'s front page on August 11th also listed the occupations of some of the accused: 'LIFEGUARD, POSTMAN, HAIRDRESSER, TEACHER, MILLIONAIRE'S DAUGHTER, CHEF AND SCHOOLBOY 11' followed by a story across pages 4 and 5, headlined, 'MANSION GATES TO MAGISTRATES' (Sabey et al., 2011:4-5). A heading across the top of the page also said, 'RIOT COURTS MEET AN UNLIKELY MOB'. Before covering the various identities of the accused and their occupations it focused on Laura Johnson:

A teenage girl hauled into court for allegedly being part of a mob of 200 looters is the privileged daughter of millionaire parents. Laura Johnson, 19 - one of dozens to appear in court yesterday - is said to have been arrested behind the wheel of a car filled with stolen electrical goods, cigarettes and alcohol worth over £6,000. ... Privately-educated Johnson has two brothers. Neighbour David Turner said: 'They are a nice, respectable family. They never caused any problems.' (ibid:4-5)

It is significant that this featured a background source expressing such surprise, describing the Johnson's as a 'nice, respectable family'. The concept of feral teenagers or family background is implicitly excluded from the Johnson family profile, unlike those of other rioters that fit the more predictable stereotype of a 'sick society' that I explore below. But this

was a subtle exception to the rule with most responses making an example of Johnson. For example, the front page of the *Daily Mail* on August 12th featured a picture of Laura Johnson, next to the main story and headline stating ‘YOU’RE A DISGRACE TO YOUR COUNTRY’ (2011:1). Page 7 then featured a story about Johnson: ‘A STAR PUPIL FROM £1M HOME. HOW DID SHE END UP IN THE DOCK?’ This article was primarily focused on the disbelief that someone from such a background had got involved in looting:

Whatever the reasons for Laura's ignominious predicament, they appear to have nothing to do with alienation or despair; not that this is any excuse for the shameful events that have scarred the country this week. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine a young woman with a brighter future; a future which has now been jeopardised; perhaps irrevocably so (Bracchi, 2011:7).

Another *Daily Mail* article showed how complex (and contradictory) this discourse became in Richard Littlejohn’s column; materialism and moralism were a central point of blame in his column. He used Enfield as an example of an area that did not support the concept of social deprivation:

Enfield isn’t a deprived inner-city ghetto, it’s a peaceful middle-class suburb. The disturbances there weren’t a protest against police brutality. A few hooligans figured the police would be so busy down the road in Tottenham that it was the perfect opportunity to rob the local Vodafone dealer (August 9th, 2011:15). ... One thing is certain: this wasn’t about poverty, not in the material sense. If there’s poverty, it’s spiritual poverty, moral poverty and poverty of ambition (ibid:15)⁴

In this instance Littlejohn suggested that materialism and greed transcend social class – partly due to the location of the riots. His efforts to clarify what is ‘certain’ about the riots reflected a recurring, modal tendency in language throughout responses to the riots; an ideological

motivation to establish an absolute ‘truth’ about what was happening. In the context of this being a *Daily Mail* article – and the broader discursive knowledge of what these responses were suppressing in their opposition to discourses of deprivation – it is clear that this was not an attempt to mobilise critical discourses of structural issues in society, and/or the economic context of materialistic greed and consumption, as cultural products of consumerism. Rather, this was another instance of what became a fragmented field of confusing and inconsistent discourses seeking to argue that the immoral ‘others’ in society transcended social class.

A two page spread in the *Daily Mail* on August 12th continued to highlight the spread of social demographics across looter profiles that transcended social class. Under the caption ‘CHILDREN, GRADUATES, A MUSICIAN... THE COURT MARATHON GOES ON’ these pages features images and accounts of rioters including: an aspiring musician who stole a violin; a student and Baptist Church mentor who looted a jewellery shop; an estate agent accused of attempted theft from PC World; and a ballet student who looted two flat screen televisions. On this spread the *Mail* ran a piece, headlined: SHAMELESS! JAILING OF A TV LOOKALIKE’. This article was about a man who was jailed for assaulting a police officer and was compared as a lookalike of *Shameless* television show character, Frank Gallagher. Clearly relying on the stereotype evoked by this comparison, it described Bernard Moore as follows:

Moore, 46, a beggar and Big Issue seller who came to Britain from America, has a previous conviction for a public order offence. He lives on a sink estate in Collyhurst, north Manchester with a young woman, calls himself Brian and like Frank Gallagher has several children who don’t live with him. Moore begs every day in Manchester city centre and hangs around with drug addicts who take heroin and crack cocaine. Every night on his way back to his flat, he buys White Ace cider and Special Brew from a local off licence with loose change (Narain, 2012:5).

Interdiscursively, there are a number of issues that surface in the account of this individual, including discourses of: drugs and alcohol; family breakdown; unemployment (implicitly relating to social welfare and benefits); crime and immigration (with a direct link between these two discursive aspects depicting an immigrant with a record of a ‘previous conviction’). This is exemplary of a discourse that concentrated on symptoms rather than causes of social issues. Despite the class complexities that surround it in discourses transcending social class on the same page, it reverts to a common stereotype, aimed to identify (or construct) a common problem. It is also an example of the discursive elements that informed proposed legislative responses to the riots, as we see below in discourses of social welfare.

Redefining the mob: Punishing the poor through Conservative social policy

The complexities and inconsistencies of discursive elements considered thus far should remain in mind when considering the legislative responses (and discursive support) that developed for Conservative measures on welfare and judicial punishments over the days concerned. The discourses considered in this section demonstrate the contradictory mechanisms that I began to highlight above. Responses that sought to deal with (or punish) rioters and cure a sick society reverted from the discursive positions covered in the previous section; subsequently contradicting previous constructions of a moral underclass that transcended the social spectrum. The *Daily Mail*’s own opinion piece, in a closing comment, said: ‘Indeed, if anything, it was Labour’s nurturing of a benefits culture, in which youngsters believe there is no need to work to have a comfortable lifestyle, which sowed the seeds of the riots – not any ‘Coalition cuts’’ (August 9th, 2011:12). Whilst there is a distinct effort to suppress the blame aimed at austerity and deprivation, a comment like this brings political responsibility back into play; it argues that government policy is significant and that the riots could be linked to issues of social welfare, but only in support of a conservative policy

agenda. Similarly, the *Daily Mail*'s comment piece on August 11th praised Cameron's response and recognition of a 'sick society' whilst defining what this society consisted of:

Meanwhile, the doling out of ever more benefits to the jobless has instilled a something-for-nothing entitlement culture which culminated in children as young as 11 this week looting shops. David Cameron, in a robust performance yesterday, finally indicated that he understands the crisis facing Britain, parts of which he correctly identified as being 'sick', rife with family breakdown and in need of urgent social repair. The bitter irony, after the mayhem of the past few days, is that if he were to boldly seize the opportunity to fix Britain's broken welfare state, law and order system, immigration controls and parlous family structures, would find an electorate devastated by what it has witnessed fully behind him (August 11th, 2011:14).⁵

Delivered within the context of unemployment and welfare, these references to a 'something-for-nothing entitlement culture' and 'family breakdown' demonstrate that cases like Laura Johnson were only mentioned as exceptions to the rule, or to serve a temporary purpose.⁶ Also, and in line with conventional conservative ideals, the interdiscursive mechanisms above bound together right wing perspectives on welfare, justice, immigration and family values. As the following examples show, the *depoliticised actions* of rioters were eventually redefined as a *politicised problem*; a problem responsible for a sick society, to be cured by Conservative policy.

For example, two articles in the *Sun* on August 11th – either side of the 'mansion gates to magistrates' article earlier – featured a link between the riots and welfare culture through Cameron's response. Their positioning and layout is significant since they provide contradictions either side of an article that constructs a moral underclass transcending the social spectrum. Headlined, 'PM Vow: I will Cure sick society', one article said: 'In his

emergency statement to the Commons today Mr Cameron will say we must restore discipline and end the something-for-nothing culture' (2011:4). Another article, on the same two-page spread, headlined, 'New law will evict riot thugs' said, 'Rioters and looters will be booted out of their council homes, the Government said yesterday. Housing minister Grant Shapps plans to extend powers to evict 'neighbours from hell' to include riot yobs' (2011:5). The issue of social welfare recurred in the *Sun*'s August 12th comment piece. Under the headline, 'STOP BENEFITS', it projected a tenuous construction of public consensus on the issue of suspending benefits for rioters: 'MORE than 100,000 people last night demanded a Commons debate on axing benefits for convicted rioters. The No10 website crashed as angry Brits tried to sign an e-petition calling for tough sanctions' (*Sun*, 2011:9)

However, it is worth noting that the *Sun*'s tone was not always completely supportive of Cameron if it did not feel his response to crime was hard enough. Its comment piece on August 12th said: 'Mr Cameron also vowed to tackle the gang culture in our cities. We've heard that before. To stamp out gangs we need less of the PM's Big Society guff and more action against criminals, together with extra jails and proper sentences with no early release' (p 8). Whilst Cameron's 'Big Society' is already a controversial issue, the *Sun*'s position is clear; interdiscursively, this argument concentrates less on community relations and more on harder approaches to justice, law and order. But this reflects a problematic, presupposed notion of extensive gang involvement in the riots. As Bridges points out:

It was reported that, during the riots, 'gangs suspended any ordinary hostilities between each other to focus on other targets' thus enabling young people to gather to protest against the police in different localities. However, it is also clear from both arrest and survey data that the involvement of gangs in co-ordinating the riots was greatly exaggerated at the time (2012:5)

Nonetheless, gangs in this instance were projected as another sick element of society that could be reformed through harder, Conservative policy. A similar occurrence on August 12th, the front page of the *Daily Telegraph*, provided a more direct criticism of Cameron. Under the headline, 'BACK ON THE STREETS', it said, 'Despite tough action promised by Cameron, child looters are freed by the courts... and they even keep their anonymity' (2011:1). Clearly implying that judicial procedures were not hard enough, this suggests that laws around youth and anonymity should be compromised due to the severity of crimes committed. In the *Daily Mail* on August 12th, youth worker, Winston Smith wrote a piece criticising the justice system and what he saw as Cameron's pseudo-tough approach to punishment. Under the headline 'TOUGH SENTENCES? FORGET IT. THESE TEEN YOBS WILL BE TREATED AS IF THEY ARE THE VICTIMS', he said:

David Cameron may have sounded tough this promising night curfews, tougher sentencing and new police powers.... But the Prime Minister is sorely mistaken if he thinks the rioters will punished and made to pay for what they've done. Why? Because the criminal justice system in this country is broken (2011:14).⁷

Interdiscursive mechanisms in Smith's article connected various policy issues through the perception of interrelated problems; criticisms of sentencing powers, a 'laughable' penal system, and criminal activity were bound up with criticisms of social welfare and immigration policy:

I have escorted a 16-year-old, unemployed, criminal teenager by taxi from his home to the benefits office so he could sign on for the dole, even though he lived only ten minutes away by foot. He was from a large Albanian family of Romany gypsies who had come to Britain seeking asylum, but each had ended up involved in criminal activities, including violent muggings and burglary (ibid:14).

This also contributed to another dismissal and criticism of ‘bleeding heart liberals’:

Despite his criminal conduct — because of it, in fact — the local youth offending team was desperate for him to claim as many benefits as possible, even laying on transport. The bizarre logic, as it was put to me, was that poverty was the cause of his illegal actions (a trite and misguided argument trotted out this week by bleeding heart liberals in defence of the looters) (ibid:14).

These criticisms (in all three newspapers) of Cameron, and the judicial legislation in place at the time, demonstrated that this was not a simple case of supporting the current, Conservative government. Rather, this discursive position indicates that, ideologically, the government needed to follow *traditional* Conservative values and a *harder* approach to social and legal policy in order to cure a ‘sick society’.

A *Telegraph* article on August 11th echoed Cameron’s response on welfare policy, implying that he needed to convince the public that his response would be hard enough. Headlined, ‘WE WILL MAKE RIOTERS SUFFER, SAYS MP’, it explained, ‘David Cameron will announce a range of measures today aimed at convincing the public that rioters will face serious jail sentences and the loss of council homes and benefits’ (Kirkup and Porter, 2011: 4). To ‘convince the public’ that these measures will be carried out presupposed that there was a public consensus calling for them already. The discursive mechanisms that sought to condone a conservative review of social welfare policy through legislative punishments relied on this juxtaposition of a moral public consensus against a dishonourable, moral underclass. Despite the social complexities that were clearly acknowledged across some vast, discursive ground (above), right wing discourses still blamed and punished those that, in other cases, it claimed were not centrally responsible for the riots. These discursive nuances and paradoxical mechanisms maintain a connection and consistency through their ideological

support for the socio-economic and 'moral' agenda of Conservative approaches to social welfare and penal policy.

CONCLUSION

This paper has considered the complexities in right wing discourses that depoliticised the actions of rioters in one context before politicising them as products of society in another. This depoliticisation worked to suppress arguments that suggested there were political contexts that could explain the riots from perspectives which were critical of government policy, expressing concerns regarding social class, deprivation and disillusioned youth in certain communities. When these discourses became *repoliticised* they were critical of communities themselves and specific demographics, which were viewed as a problem produced by parts of society and the political system (social welfare) that needed to be changed (punishment via benefit reduction). Hence the discursive inconsistencies that appeared contradictory in one sense could be explained ideologically when considered in the context of the right wing press; in the arguments that were suppressed initially and those that were later mobilised in order to support government policy through a presupposed connection between criminality and social welfare.

For example, the discourses considered above often focused on issues of crime and morality that transcended social class; various stories covered the 'respectable' backgrounds and occupations of those in court, especially in the case of Laura Johnson. These discourses often functioned as a mechanism for suppressing or responding to criticisms that initially blamed community relations with the police, government policy, austerity, social isolation and

disillusionment when the riots started. But the suppressive role that complex representations of social class played, were also a hindrance to simplistic definitions of a 'sick society' that blamed the welfare state. Laura Johnson provided a useful tool for opposing certain arguments. But the broader language and context of these media and political responses still reverted to perceptions of a 'sick society' concerning lower social classes. Therefore, I have argued that cases like Johnson functioned as '*paradoxically persuasive*' mechanisms. The ideological interests that bind these discursive dynamics together override contradictory messages by "making sense" through the consistent purpose that they serve.

It was also the case that right wing discourses did not just suppress criticisms of government cuts and austerity; they actually used the context of the riots to legitimise other financial penalties on poorer social groups that have not been considered in this analysis. For example, the *Riots Communities and Victims Panel* recommended 'schools should face financial penalties (rather than additional support) should they fail to achieve age-related literacy standards among their pupils and appoint 'business ambassadors' to promote youth employment' (Bridges, 2012:9). The latter is not only evidence of political interests furthered through responses to the riots, but, like the suspensions of housing benefit, these issues are specifically aimed at those from less privileged backgrounds. Therefore, this analysis has noted a similar problem to that identified by Bridges. As he points out, when the riot panel report touched on structural issues in society it still seemed to lack a sense of recognition regarding the true depth and severity of economic troubles and austerity cuts, especially in relation to their urban impact (2012:9). Similarly, the right wing press did refer to certain issues (like greed, materialism, and class complexity) that should, arguably, be considered in a nuanced, sociological and economic understanding of the riots. But then they reverted to traditional, Conservative ideological values in calls to cure a 'sick society'.

It is important to recognise that this article has not attempted to propose one, fixed answer for why the riots happened or who was to blame. The modal claims of a ‘truth’ or ‘certainty’ about the riots functioned in a binary context where a particular set of ‘facts’ would establish some clear explanation whilst suppressing the complexity of other relevant (and reported) issues. I do not propose from this analysis that the constructions and discursive trends explored above were planned conspiratorially either. Rather, I showed that oppositional arguments sporadically drew on convenient examples and observations depending on the immediate purpose that they served. It is interesting that such contradictions occurred across media discourses whilst continuing to provide strong, populist arguments. This is not to say that all readers and audiences follow the same viewpoints, but it does highlight the negotiated material that readers and audiences grapple with – consciously or not – on a daily basis. It is important that discourse analysts continue to scrutinise the complicated constructions of political discourse. It is naïve to assume that the political bias of news providers equates to predictable, consistent and monolithically ideological constructions in news stories. Discourse does not work so simply. Discourse is complex and context is important. Discursive nuances, contradictions and paradoxical mechanisms can be understood when we reflect upon the ideological contexts of their *production* and *consumption*. This is the level and depth at which analysts can understand the complicated discursive landscapes that operate across multiple social contexts and environments. We do not always see, or experience, what we expect in the discursive exchanges that we engage in. But understanding the discursive and ideological operations that function beyond the immediate text enables us to scrutinise the sources concerned and understand the interests of power that they serve. Hence, it is essential for critical analysts to continue to explore the subtle, complicated and persuasive representations of media and political sources.

Notes

¹ 'Its final report ... resonates with the Victorian values and underlying notions of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor found in David Lammy's book. Both are also reminiscent in their analysis of the type of 'culture of poverty' thinking found in the infamous Moynihan report following the American urban disorders of the 1960s.²⁹ This focuses on what are seen as the personal defects and social development problems of rioters – their lack of 'resilience', inability to 'defer gratification', ill-discipline, absent fathers and lack of 'proper role models' – rather than attempting to address the sources of their grievances or structural factors in society. It is as though the Panel, in reaching its conclusion that it is necessary to give the rioters 'a stake in society', failed ever to consider what sort of society Britain has become.' (Bridges, 2012:8).

² It should be noted that discourses of race during the same sample and time period are in need of closer, detailed analysis but function beyond the scope of this article. Slack's *Daily Mail* article shows how discourses of morality and race overlap and are interconnected beyond any point of clear separation.

³ Dr Huppert: 'Whereas the Mayor was saying that most of the people involved were known to police and that we should be dealing with that group of people, you are saying that, in fact, that is just an artefact of the fact they are the first people you rounded up; is that correct?'

Tim Godwin: 'That may well turn out to be the case, because we still have lots of images to go through and obviously the ones that you know are going to be arrested first.'

(Ball and Drury, 2012:12)

⁴ The *Sun*'s front page on August 12th featured the case of Chelsea Ives, from Enfield. Under the headline, 'Olympic girl, 18 'trashed cop car'', it said, 'A teenage girl accused of wrecking a police car in the riots is a London Olympics ambassador. Chelsea Ives, 18, was arrested after her parents allegedly saw her on TV during the mayhem in Enfield and called police. Mum Adrienne, 43, said: 'I have no regrets. I love my daughter but she was brought up to know right from wrong.' Prosecutor Becky Owens claimed Chelsea had shouted to a friend: 'This is the best day ever!' - then hurled a rock at a shop window' (Syson, August 12th, 2011:1).

⁵ A *Sun* letter on 12th also said: 'And it's not about being rich or poor. There are opportunities out there for young people to attend training or become part of a local project or community. The issue is a lack of ambition, the expectation that they should get something for nothing.'

⁶ Interestingly, the *Sun*'s comment piece on August 12th also demonstrated that the actions of rioting and looting did *not* automatically make someone a yob, but actually a presupposed social stereotype that was classified separately from other profiles: 'In court, it was payback time for rioting morons. From yobs to university graduates and even a trainee ballerina, they took their turn in the dock' (page 8). Clearly there is a wider social context and profile that determines this label; Johnson's social background exempts her from 'yob' status during her actions.

⁷ The *Daily Mail*'s comment piece, alongside Smith's column on the same page, is worth noting (and possibly exploring beyond the scope of this analysis). Headlined, 'Bankers looters and politics of envy', it criticised banks for refusing to provide financial help or sympathy to businesses that had been destroyed during the riots: 'Let's be clear: nothing - *nothing* - could justify or excuse the violent criminality of the looting anarchists who this week so stained Britain's reputation as a civilised society. But is it surprising that an increasing number of decent civic-minded people consider the bankers' behaviour to be almost as reprehensible? After all, they argue, the bankers have the same contempt for the law-abiding public as those looters and the same sense of entitlement to wealth as the teenagers who smash shop windows to steal flat-screen televisions. More worryingly, the bankers' refusal to rein in their greed is fuelling the politics of envy in Britain and envy is a toxic and corrosive creator of social unrest and Left-wing demagoguery' (2011:14).

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